

Movie Makers

September-October, 2000

Volume 10 No. 5

The American Motion Picture Society

The UNICA Festival

Nora Serra

UNICA is an independent international organization. It is a member of the competent UNESCO Council.

The purpose of UNICA is:

- (1) To promote video and film making as instruments of international communication.
- (2) To support international cultural cooperation.
- (3) To represent its member federations at UNESCO.
- (4) To achieve recognition for the independence and freedom of expression of member federations.

UNICA began its First International Amateur Film Competition in Brussels, Belgium in 1931. Five countries partici-

pated. A UNICA film festival is an annual event that takes place in a different country and now has over 35 countries participating. The United States is a member. In Poland (1997,) The Americans won a silver and bronze medal.

(Ed-AMPS is the USA representative) Prizes are awarded by an international jury which also includes professional filmmakers: the most interesting "UNICA Jeunesse" competition is intended for younger filmmakers up to the age of 25. It is included in the competition of the national competition.

The WORLD MINUTE MOVIE CUP competition includes films of less than one minute. It is open to non-members.

Audiences have the opportunity to meet the filmmakers and discuss the films that are presented at the annual film festival. The discussions are usually

held with the assistance of simultaneous interpreters. The three main languages spoken are English, French, and German. Some of the films have English sub-titles.

The social events that take place at the UNICA FILM FESTIVALS include excursions to famous sites and special cultural entertainment. There is a large banquet at the beginning and end of the festival.

UNICA welcomes the films from the United States. The next film festival will be August 3rd through the 12th, 2001 at Tallinn, Estonia. The 2002 Festival will be held August 23rd through September first, 2002 in Luxembourg.

More information can be found in the annex and on the Internet website of UNICA: <http://www.knoware.nl/users/unica>

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Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

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MOVIE MAKERS is published bi-monthly on the 25th day of even-numbered months by the AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY and features news and articles of interest to the serious motion picture maker, video or film.

Membership price per year is \$7.00, Canada \$9.00, foreign addresses \$10.00, all payable in U.S. funds or equivalent. Articles may be copied when the source is given. Back copies are available at .80 cents post paid.

George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909-1996

Matt Jenkins, Editor

The AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY is not connected with any other organization, society, club or association. The Society does not offer dual, club, nor group memberships.

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From the Editor

Distribution is the word of the month. I have finished my latest documentary and have started looking for places to show it. Now I'm being realistic here. Technically the piece is excellent. Digitally shot and edited in the AVID, the picture is superb. Even VHS copies look great. Story line was well developed. It is a story dealing with the building of an electrical generator that could generate power while on the moon. Who doesn't love a NASA story? I picked a charismatic narrator, have interviews with the people involved and included great footage from NASA.

A disadvantage is, the program is only 30 minutes long. I believe networks, distributors and other program suppliers want hour long pieces. Also, I've been told that a network like PBS wants shows that were produced in conjunction with a known production entity such as Nebraska Public television. So what to do?

I created a cool web site. I produced a brochure and have been sending it to PBS affiliated TV stations. I've been trying to talk to every media contact I know. I've even made calendars to give away to interested people. I've sent VHS preview copies to people I thought might want to see it. Of course the copies had a professional looking label and cover. My response rate has been extremely low. Remember, I'm in this for exposure not the financial gain

so stations or networks can air this show for the price of the tape and shipping.

After I've exhausted my PBS affiliates list then I will approach the cable networks and local access channels. I also hope it will have an excellent festival run.

I've shelled out some bucks to produce VHS copies. With me making the copies, each copy costs me \$2.38. I know there are copy houses that will do it cheaper but for larger number of copies. My \$2.38 buys me the tape, a plastic box, a spine and face label, a printed sleeve for the box and a mailer.

If I ship it book rate then it will cost another \$1.13. If I send it priority mail then its another 3.20 but I can deduct .52 cents for the cost of the mailer as the post office provides mailers free for priority mail.

I know many AMPS members are not interested in wide spread viewing of their work but I spent valuable column space discussing distribution for a reason. There are more venues than ever in which to showcase our work. We need to promote ourselves and AMPS through trying to get our work seen in as many places as possible.

Thank you to everyone who wrote regarding the "Why Did It Win, Why Did It Lose?" article in the last issue. The newsletter will continue to contain festival and judging articles. As always you mail e-mail me at mattj@cameron.edu.

Matt Jenkins

Abstract and Off-Beat

No. 10 – January 1993

By George Cushman

The greater the variety of pictures in a competition, the more difficult it becomes for a judge to select the best one he sees. Any competent judge will agree.

Seventy years ago, when amateur movie making was well under way, most entries were documentaries, largely of a travelogue nature. Dramatic, story type pictures were few and far between because the average moviemaker in these days did not understand dramatic construction.

Today a motion picture competition is composed of a huge variety of types. While documentaries and dramatic fare still dominate, there is an ever increasing number of so-called "experimental" movies, abstract endeavors, and others that have sometimes been referred to as "mood and fantasy," whatever that covers.

There are those who would prohibit these that are difficult to classify. But in practically all competitions the entry form will state "Any motion picture is eligible.

The immediate problem becomes, how is a picture of one type judged against another type? A simple documentary, for example, against a far out abstract? Consider:

What is a perfect documentary? You are, hopefully, experienced sufficiently that you can recognize what constitutes perfection in this genre. Very well, how close to perfection does the picture come? Would you say it was a 10?

The same judgment procedure goes to the far out abstract, except that you don't know what a far out abstract should be. They are all different; they seem to follow no set pattern, no guidelines, and no discipline. Now you must fall back on asking yourself, "What was



this maker trying to accomplish? Has this person succeeded? Was the effort easy to watch? Is it worth watching by those who appreciate this type of work? Are the technical aspects of the work relatively good? Outstanding? If the work could be classified, how well has the film maker reached the pinnacle of success within the chosen sphere?"

It is a difficult assignment.

With documentaries it is no problem to measure one

against the other, but with far out material this is next to impossible.

If the competition has two or more abstracts (or two or more in any of the minority genres) one can be weighed against another for a decision, but many judges at this point will tell you that judging at this point ceases and what you are actually doing is picking a personal preference.

Other judges working with you may discuss the far outs. Chances are they will disagree: then who will be right?

To any judge there comes a time when the judge must assess a value to a work not understandable to the individual. Yet the judge must cast a vote for it or against it. At this point a judge should listen to the other judges and hopefully get some idea of the merits of the picture in question. The entrant is entitled to an honest evaluation and subsequent vote.

The judge can do no more than weight the picture's fine points towards what is considered perfection for that type of work, and hope that judging will be fair.

Members of the viewing audience after a screening will often disagree with the judges' decisions on documentaries and dramatic fare, but a discussion on the judgments of far out pictures is seldom heard. Ever notice that?

Just For Laughs: The Sound and Fury

Stan Whitsitt

The ultimate ego trip for a maker of film comedies is the sound of a few scattered chuckles that then spread and swell to a full-blown house-encompassing belly laugh. The amateur moviemaker does not often experience this pleasant scenario because too few of them attempt comedic films. This is truly a pity.

Inasmuch as humor and comedy are subjective entities, this discussion will not attempt a step-by-step "How to make a Funny Movie" approach, but will instead present an overview of the concept of humor and its translation into film.

Before going into the facets of the humorous film, one should strive for some understanding of comedy as a general concept. Perhaps it will be helpful to discuss humor in general before we move on to the more specific topic of cinematic humor.

What makes people laugh? There is no single answer. It is a personal thing with each individual. Many factors influence what people think is funny. Some considerations are age, sex, ethnic background, environment, and education, to name a few.

In a very interesting view of humor, Steve Allen tells us: "Comedy is about tragedy. By that I mean that most of the things we laugh about are disasters of one degree or another, either actual or make-believe. Stop and consider what jokes are about. They are about fat people, skinny people, dumbbells, hotel rooms that are too small, drunks, sexual problems, high prices, inflation, pollution, radiation, martial tensions, laziness, as well

as the traditional Judaic-Christian foibles of pride, covetousness, lust, gluttony, and envy. In other words, there is nothing funny about perfection. Things are funny in some sort of loose relationship to how far they fall short of perfection."

John Kaesler, in another view, discusses what he calls the "Tight-rope Nature of humor," in this manner:

"Picture if you will, this scene...A formal stuffy affair is being held in a swank ballroom. The orchestra puts forth measured music and people dance slowly and correctly. Suddenly a man is seen standing and glaring down at the other people. He is a heavyset, pompous figure who gives off vibrations of disapproval, disdain, and a certain fearsome overdone dignity...The music falters and fades out...the dancers stop.

Arrogantly, the man starts to descend the beautiful curving staircase. At the first step he slips and falls on his butt. A snicker or two is heard but is quickly controlled. He keeps falling...clumpety-clump... There is more muffled laughter for he is doing one of the world's greatest Prat-falls. Now somersaulting down he careens off the wall at the second floor landing...and keeps falling. People roar! By the time he reaches the bottom of the staircase the crowd is howling with mirth. He slides to a stop on the polished floor and lies thee...DEAD!"

According to Kaesler, when you figure out exactly which step of the stairway marked the point at which the situation ceased to be funny, you will know what humor is. Carlyle Trevelyan, in a third view says: "regardless of type, all humor is based on the clever use of the unexpected, the unusual, the ludicrous, or the exaggerated. Its function is to destroy in some way, human dignity. The quality of the humor depends on the way and to what degree that dignity is damaged."

This article does not presume to tell you how to make a comedy. It will present some of the author's philosophy and will discuss some techniques which it is hoped will provide the reader with some worthwhile ideas that can be adapted to his or her own filmmaking philosophy and creative methods

Nuts and Bolts.

Make your film about a subject that you like and find amusing. Regardless of the type or subject of your production, you will discover the following attitudes among the people who view it. A certain number of them will think it is the greatest thing since "Birth of a Nation" (bless them!) Others will reckon as how it ain't so bad. Then there are the unappreciative clods that think it stinks. In light of these statistics, don't waste too much time and effort stretching for that "unreachable star." ...A picture that will suit the taste of every viewer.

When planning your comedy, remember that humor is a fragile commodity and handle it accordingly. The amateur filmmaker should approach the humorous film with caution, but not necessarily with dread.

The humorous film should start with a humorous premise. The premise, once established, should be developed logically. Once the wheels are set in motion, play it straight, just as though it were a drama. Do not permit your actors to act funny unless you have that one-in-a-million phenomenon, a genuinely gifted and trained comic. Comedy is not a talent that most amateur players can easily master and develop. This limitation places the biggest burden on you, the writer and producer. You must work the humor into the story idea and the structure of the film, yet stay within the limitations of your actors.

(Continued on page 5)

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Keep it simple! Simplicity is the amateur's key to successful film comedy. The major ingredient that determines whether a production soars with the eagles or limps along with the turkeys is the idea it conveys. Simplicity! You don't need fancy sets or elaborate props to put across a truly humorous idea. The premium is on the inventiveness, personal creativity, outlook, and perception of the filmmaker.

In films, humor, in its broadest sense, is achieved by three methods. First and most important, is visual humor. Second is humorous narration and third, humorous dialogue. In most instances a combination of at least two of these elements are employed. The amateur is better off striving for maximum impact via the visual approach. He will find this the least demanding, inasmuch as humorous narration requires the additional skills of a writer, and successful use of dialogue calls for good comedic actors.

Humor is generally categorized as either broad or subtle. Slapstick falls in the category of broad humor; the pratfall and pie-in-the-face routines are the most common examples of this type.

Subtle comedy, on the other hand, depends on the portrayal of the quirks of human nature, or the interaction between diverse characters, usually played straight and low key, with a combination of visual action and dialogue furnishing the punch. Television provides excellent opportunities for study and analysis of different styles and methods.

Following are four humorous "concepts," and some are examples showing how they can be used to elicit laughs from your audience.

THE UNEXPECTED

The "expert" called in to repair a car, turns a bolt and the fender falls

off.

THE EXAGGERATED...

The hero in a one week vacation drinks enough beer (soft drinks etc.) to generate a stack of empties that completely hides him from view.

THE UNDERSTATED...

The obviously funny situation that is deliberately underplayed as though it were a dramatic situation.

THE ANTICIPATED...

A banana peel is thrown down and the expected pratfall does not occur as the subject obviously and carefully steps over and around it (or, if you like, let the pratfall occur.)

The above are simplistic examples; the creative filmmaker will use them as jumping off points for a dozen variations and interpretations.

Humorous effects can be created with camera speed. Scenes shot at speeds slower than the projector speed (undercranked) will have jerky speeded up action that is naturally funny to watch. Single framing can give even more exaggerated action. A word of caution is in order. A little of this effect goes a long way, so don't over do it. Serious thought should go into selection of music for the humorous movie. Music can enhance the visuals to suggest humorous conditions or a comedic dimension of its own. By studying comedy shows on TV you can see a wide spectrum of musical forms employed to bolster the writing and acting phases of the production.

Clothing worn by players can augment the humorous tone of the film. Certain articles of clothing seem to carry a humorous connotation.

Here is a sample list (author's opinion only.)

-Derby hats are funny, bowlers

are not.

- Plaid suits are funny, blue blazers are not.
- Bow ties are funny, four-in-hand ties are not.
- Tennis shoes are funny, ballet slippers are not.
- Baggy pants are funny, jeans are not.

Get the idea? Clothes are just another device that can be used to maximize the impact of your idea or theme.

When dealing with these devices, which are really gimmicks, the filmmaker must keep one thing firmly in mind. The gimmicks by themselves will not make a film. They must be incorporated as seamlessly as possible within the context of the story or the end result will be a disjointed series of gags that never gets off the ground as a movie.

Next to the story idea of a humorous film, pacing or timing is almost as important. If a joke is held too long, it dies. Comedy films do not subscribe to the theory that if something is good, twice as much will be twice as good. Keep the pace moving so that no element has time to get stale. In the comedy, even more so than in other types of films, the editing must be kept tight.

In summary...to make a successful comedy one must start with a humorous premise or idea, keep it simple, play it straight, look for humorous devices to reinforce the actions and maintain the pace through tight editing. The key ingredient as most filmmakers will agree, is the ever-elusive idea, the starting point. Once the idea is conceived, it is all downhill from there.

The JVC TOKYO VIDEO FESTIVAL, A REVIEW

By

Matt Jenkins

The kind of festival I really like is the festival that tells you ahead of time who the judges are, is free to enter, and has great prizes. The JVC Tokyo Festival fills are three requirements extremely well.

When you receive your entry form, the judges, with their pictures, are listed. Each judge also makes a little statement. I think this is marvelous. It helps you to determine if your entry is appropriate.

I enter this festival over and over because it is FREE to enter. That's right, no cost to enter, zip-nothing. I love this kind of festival. I may never win but I'm not shelling out big bucks not to win either. Plus, even if you don't win, the festival committee sends you neat stuff. One year I received a kidney shaped box containing a pen, pencil, and scissors.

The requirements for entering are few. Generally there is an over all theme to each year's festival but it's conveniently vague so just about any entry will be OK. A second requirement is length. Program length is limited to twenty minutes.

The grand prizewinner is flown to Tokyo and the awards ceremony is broadcast over the Internet.

So after singing the festival's praises is there a downside?

After entering this festival numerous times, I still have difficulty locating someone who would send me an entry form. It could be that I'm not doing something right but I feel that perhaps the word is not getting out. After going through JVC's hierarchy, I finally found someone, who was extremely nice, willing to help.

So will I enter again? Absolutely. Enter and enter often. You may not win but you won't lose either. And if you do win, it will be quite a feather in your cap.

CONTACT: www.jvc-victor.co.jp/english/tvf/index-e.html



AMPS Winners

Judging for the American International Film and Video Competition will not be completed by the time this issue has gone to press. All winners will be announced in our next issue.

The Buffalo Broadcasting System

By

Matt Jenkins

Video production is being taught in public schools across the country. The Garden City Kansas public school system is no different. The high school has a student opportunity for production called the Buffalo Broadcasting System.



Buffalo Broadcasting System

The Buffalo Broadcasting System or BBS serves many functions. Students are able to produce live programming and receive on-air experience in TV announcing, reporting, and production experience.

Typically these students shoot using the Panasonic AG-456 S-VHS camcorder and work on a variety of news programming.

Instructor Shelby McNutt teaches the broadcasting courses and oversees the student productions. Be sure to check out what this impressive group of high school students is producing.

The BBS WEB SITE: <http://gckschools.com/users/mcnutts/mediatechnology/homepage.html>

Interesting Movie Trivia

During the silent era of movie making, a "feature length" movie was about 30 minutes long. It eventually expanded to 80 or 90 minutes by 1920.

In the early years of talking films, film companies often hired journalists to write screenplays since they could come up with exciting stories, write believable dialogue, and understood the meaning of meeting a deadline.

In regards to a screenplay that Sergei Eisenstein wrote, David

Selznick said that "the advancement of the art" of cinema was "not the business of this organization."

Hollywood's first all-talking feature was *The Lights of New York* which made over \$1 million at the box office. Boris Karloff was offered the



part of the monster in *Frankenstein* only after Bela Lugosi refused it.

In the Hollywood of the 1930's, a top director was expected to shoot approximately two and a half minutes of finished film a day otherwise the studio would face added production costs.



Upcoming Festivals

Close Date	Festival Name & Address for forms	Open to:	Sub-ject	For-mats	Time Limit	Entry Fee	Award	Show Dates
10/2/00	30th Annual Australian Int'l Amateur Widescreen Festival Australian Widescreen Assoc. Box 292 Mooroolbark VIC 3138 Australia e-mail< scope@netcore.com.au> or www.ourworld.compuserve.com/homepage s/coralsea/awa.htm	ABD	G	8mm- 16mm 2:1 MN on 16:9 format PAL NTSC	None	Free		Shown throughout Australia for 3 months
1/6/01	IAC Int'l & Video Festival 24c West Street, Epsom, Surrey, KT18 7RJ UK or http://www.theiac.org.uk	ABC	G	HJMNO PZ PAL,NT SC,SE CAM	NONE	See note1 below	T, some cash, U V,W	3/30 to 4/1/01
N/A Not Announced or Not Available		ALL FORMATS ARE NTSC UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED						
A Non Commercial B College Student C Hi Sch Gr Sch	D Independent E Commercial F Restricted	G Open H S8 J 16mm	K Other L 3/4 " M VHS	N SVHS O 8mm P Hi8 Z MiniDV	Q Invitatatl'l R Regional S Exceptions	T Cash U Trophies V Certificate	W Other Award X Approximate Y It Varies	

Note 1~~~ One minute competition £5, Up to 30 minutes £9, over 30 minutes £12 Plus £1 handling charge for non IAC members plus return postage if videos/films are to be returned (ALL in STERLING DRAFTS)

The Ameri- can International Film and Video Festi- val Results

J udging for the American International Film and Video Competition will not be completed by the time this issue has gone to press. All winners will be announced in our next issue

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY

I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker) \$ 7.00

Dues Canada: (includes. - Movie Maker) \$ 9.00

Dues-Foreign: (includes - Movie Maker) \$10.00

Enclosed _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS : _____

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Mail to: AMPS, 30 Kanan Rd., Oak Park, CA 91377-1105

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